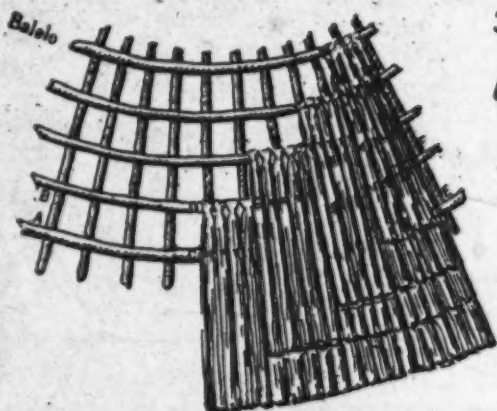


double object in view in thus crowning the huts : first to keep the rain from percolating through at the top, and secondly to impart to the building, by means of this highly ornamental addition, a degree of finish, an air of beauty, ease and opulence which it certainly would never have possessed had it terminated in an ordinary point. It is, no doubt, owing to the fact that the crown is the glory of the house that it is removed as soon as the occupant dies!

There are still two more operations to be performed before the hut is finished : the plastering (*bama* (Ro.), *phama* (Dj.) and the making of the door. But these two jobs can be undertaken at the same time for the very good reason that plastering is the work of the wives, while making the door is that of the husband. Accompanied by other women of the village, the future mistress of the hut starts out for the marshes to collect some black clay (*bomphi*). If the marshes are too far off, she will content herself with digging in one of the ants' nests on the hillside. These terrible ants, which destroy everything, collect large quantities of hard earth, with which to build their nests, and this differs largely from the sand of the surroundings. (It may perhaps be simply sand hardened and changed by the acid secretions of the termites.) The *shirundju*, the conical basket which women carry on their heads, will be used to take home clods of red or black clay, and, using the same baskets, they will fetch from the cattle kraal some fresh dung which they mix with the clay, inside the new hut, pouring water on the mixture to reduce it to the proper consistency. They tread the unsavoury mud with their feet, and, with this semi-liquid mortar, plaster the wall on the inside,



Construction of the Thonga roof.

342

333●

342

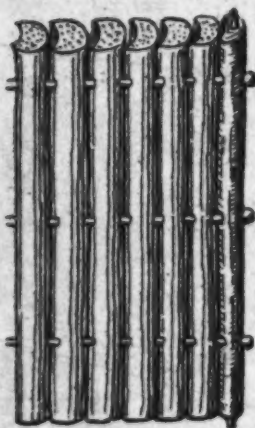
[462]

[482]

introducing the mud between the reeds and spreading it out with the palms of their hands until it forms a smooth layer all over the interior. Not a ray of light can now enter the hut, except through some small open spaces to be seen, here and there, between the roof and the top of the wall. The air circulates more or less through these small vents, which, however, were not included in the original plan of the hut. The remainder of the clay makes a hard even flooring which will be re-covered from time to time with a fresh coating of black plaster (l. p. 187).

333

342



Door of a Ronga hut.

As regards the *door*, the Ba-Ronga in the country round Rikatla generally make it of the wood of the mimale palm (*Raphia vinifera*, see p. 4). They cut down one or two of the giant leaves of this tree, which grows in the marshes. The leaf itself is one enormous central stalk with narrow folioles on either side; these are cut off and the nerve remains: a sort of gigantic switch, twenty to thirty feet in length, about four to six inches wide at the base and tapering gradually to its point, convex on one side, and concave on the other. Once dried, it turns a grey colour. The interior is a fibrous

137

335

342

pith, of extraordinarily light weight, whilst the exterior bark is very thin, hard and shiny as though it had been varnished with copal. It is impossible to imagine a lighter wood. Comfortably established under the shady trees of the square, our joiner cuts the nerve into several pieces of a given length (say about four feet, the height of the wall). This is not difficult, for it is only necessary to cut through the thin outer bark, when the knife slips through the inner pith, like so much butter! These lengths are then bored through from front to back in three places, say at one, two and three feet from the bottom, and three stout sticks are passed through the holes, firmly holding the several pieces of the nerve together: this makes the door. The ends of the transverse sticks are fixed into a pole which is pointed top and bottom, thus forming pivots or hinges.

335

342